



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JURY CONVICTS KCK MAN IN COUNTERFEIT CHECK CONSPIRACY

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Kansas City, Kan., man was convicted by a federal jury today for heading a conspiracy to cash counterfeit checks.

Thomas E. Watson-El, 32, of Kansas City, was found guilty of participating in a conspiracy to create and pass counterfeit checks from Dec. 5, 2003, to April 19, 2004.

Following the presentation of evidence in **Watson-El's** trial, the jury in U.S. District Court in Kansas City deliberated less than an hour before returning the guilty verdict to U.S. District Judge Nanette K. Laughrey, ending a trial that began July 19, 2004.

Watson-El used a computer to create counterfeit checks and forms of identification, Graves said, then recruited others who used the checks and fake ID to purchase merchandise at retail stores. The merchandise was later sold to another person or returned to the store for a refund, with **Watson-El** and the co-defendants sharing in the proceeds. The total loss to the victims as a result of the conspiracy was found by the jury to exceed \$30,000, but less than \$70,000. Moreover, the jury found **Watson-El** to be the leader/organizer of a conspiracy involving five or more other people.

Under federal law, Graves explained, **Watson-El** may be subject to a sentence of up to five years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. His sentence will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney John E. Cowles. It was investigated by the U.S. Secret Service, incorporating related investigations from the Kansas

City, Mo., Police Department and the Overland Park, Kan., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow